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Exploring familial relations across the globe

PARIN DOSSA and CATI COE. 2017. *Transnational Aging and Reconfigurations of Kin Work*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 242 pp. ISBN 9780813588087

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In the twenty-first century, older people's aging trajectories are increasingly influenced by transnational migration, either their own or that of their children, or sometimes both. How do these mobilities affect intergenerational relationships and conceptualizations of care within families?

Transnational Aging and Reconfigurations of Kin Work, edited by Parin Dossa and Cati Coe, sheds light on the significance, asymmetries and tensions of reciprocal and intergenerational familial ties regarding care and kin work, both reconfigured within transnational contexts. In nine chapters, this volume presents ethnographic case studies from across the globe that document the multiple intertwining of aging, migration and kin work and how different dynamics, practices and processes of transnational care (re)shape experiences of aging as part of the life course.

In the first part of the book, *The Kin-scription of Older People into Care*, Neda Deneva, Yanqiu Rachel Zhou and Kristin Elizabeth Yarris discuss intergenerational kin work by highlighting the transformations of care work within changing familial relations that are influenced by socioeconomic and political changes on the national and international level. Deneva (Chapter 1) describes Bulgarian grandmothers within the EU whose lives are extensively affected by the tensions of reproductive and productive labor and are constrained by fulfilling kin obligations. In a nuanced way, she shows how the 'young-old' grandmothers become most vulnerable by sacrificing their own social and financial security in order to care for their grandchildren and aging in-laws living abroad and how the changing familial relations evoke new forms of

dependency. In Chapter 2, Zhou focuses on the changing aging trajectories that develop among Chinese grandparents that follow their emigrated adult children to Canada to take care of their grandchildren as a consequence of insufficient welfare policies of the Canadian state. While the aging caregivers, on the one hand, see migration as a valuable opportunity for their own children and maintain the cultural significance of the family from their homeland by passing on “intergenerational love” (49) to their grandchildren, they simultaneously experience their unpaid work and new lives also as a challenge to find their roles by being “not a master, not a guest, not a servant” (54) in their children’s homes. Kristin Yarris illustrates in Chapter 3 the ambivalent emotions that Nicaraguan grandmothers develop towards migration while caring for their grandchildren whose mothers have migrated to the United States. Yarris exposes in sharp detail that the experiences of their spouses’ migration in the past shape the grandmothers’ narratives of their daughters’ migration towards their grandchildren. While “replacing” their absent daughters, the Nicaraguan grandmothers, firstly, perceive this absence as either a threat to their own and their grandchildren’s well-being and upheld values or, secondly, as a sacrifice of the mothers to sustain their left-behind children and families.

In the volume’s second section, *Reconfigurations of Kinship and Care in Migration Contexts*, the authors elucidate how kin work and care are reshaped against the backdrop of migration.

In Chapter 4, Erin Raffety reveals how Chinese foster mothers, abandoned by their migrated children, recuperate from socioeconomic disadvantages by caring for disabled children that are later adopted by international parents. Against the common picture of older people in Asia that are merely reacting to their children’s decisions, the author highlights the agency of older foster mothers by actively bringing news perspectives on kinship and inducing social change within society. Furthermore, Raffety elucidates that the relationship between foster mother and child, despite and because of their vulnerable positions, their mutual bonding reintegrates them into society and improves their social and economic status. Khan and Kobayashi (Chapter 5) examine middle-aged Hindu women that have migrated from Sri Lanka and India and now live in multigenerational households in Canada. Here, they find themselves in the complex situation of satisfying the needs of not only their children but also those of their parents and in-laws apart from their own requirements. In their study, the authors reveal that these women are challenged by meeting their responsibilities as caring daughters and other obligations in their country of residence that contrast their notions of ideal cultural and familial values and a caring self.

Loretta Baldassar (Chapter 6) looks at how different types of communication technology impact care within transnational families. In her research among different age cohorts of Italian

migrants in Australia, she emphasizes that the intensity and frequency of care exchange is affected by the distance of the people, not necessarily only in a spatial but also in a temporal sense.

The chapters in section three, *Aging, Kin Work, and Migrant Trajectories*, by Cati Coe, Delores Mullings and Parin Dossa describe rich in detail the impacts of transnational migration on aging trajectories. Cati Coe (Chapter 7) discusses the retirement strategies of aging Ghanaian care workers that want to return home after working for decades in the United States. As their work was only low-paid and the desired form of care within the US is not available to them, they decide to return to Ghana where they can live from their savings from work and Social Security paid from the US. Though the aging Ghanaians choose to return, Coe points to the return as a logical consequence of the given circumstances within the system of global capitalism and imaginations of respectful elder care based on their personal working experiences. In Chapter 8, Mullings examines the kin work of older Caribbean Canadian women from a critical race feminist perspective. The women in her study migrated decades ago and were, during their working lives, low-paid and suffering from chronic diseases in higher age leaving them in financial need during their retirement in Canada. Despite their vulnerable situation, these women contribute not only by caring financially and emotionally for their family members at 'home' but are also involved in religious and social communities as volunteers. Mullings argues that their poor financial and health situation mirrors the inadequate social infrastructures of Canada and the Caribbean to support older migrants responsibly. Chapter 9 by Dossa examines the last stage of life among of Canadian Ismaili Muslim migrants in palliative care centers. She highlights the significance of kin work during the last stage of life by pointing at the care relations between the dying and their family that acknowledge the former's work during the lifetime. This is particularly visible as kin care for their dying family member although they have other obligations in their busy lives.

Dossa's and Coe's edited volume *Transnational Aging and Reconfigurations of Kin work* is an indispensable contribution to research on transnationalism, family relations and aging and a must read for anyone working on these topics. Apart from providing various ethnographic writings from different authors that describe their findings nuanced and rich in detail, the book enables the reader to gain new perspectives into the lives of aging migrants. Unfortunately, South-South migration was not taken into consideration in the selection of the chapters which would have completed the global perspectives on transnational aging and kin work.

Nevertheless, the book is a foundational work and helps social and human sciences scholars as well as students obtaining a deeper understanding in the conceptualization of transnational processes and dynamics influencing aging and reciprocal kin work.

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